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NARRATOR Leonard R. Parsons

INTERVIEWER Phyllis Lotz

PLACE Parson's Home

First St, Solvang

DATE April 21, 1982

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Interview with Leonard Parsons
Date of Interview: April 21, 1982, Solvang, CA.
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction

Mr.P: I was born in Upola, Kansas, near Paola, Kansas, it was just a very small railroad town and I think it has since disappeared. My grandparents, maternal were Wesley J. Loos and Matty Loos of Kansas my paternal grandparents were Daniel Parson and Nan Parsons also of Kansas. Berton Lee Parsons and May Loos Parsons were my parents. I had two brothers, Wesley and Olie and one sister, Fanny. My folks moved to Fort Collins when I was 6 years old, I attended grade school there at the Franklin School and then the LaPort School. My folks moved to Forsyth, Montana to a ranch and I attended Howard School. I lived on a farm, milked cows, irrigated and every thing that had to do with farming until I was so tired of it I wanted to do something else.

PL: What about your brothers and sister?

Mr. P: One was a year older and one, a year younger and my sister was four years younger. They have all passed on. My sister died when she was 12 years old of Brights Disease, an illness of the kidney due to the after math of Scarlet Fever. In those days they did not have the inoculations they have now. My two brothers were heavy smokers, I believe, one died with cancer of the lung three years,

that was Wesley, and Olie died of poor circulation of one of his legs but I am still on deck.

I stayed in Forsyth, Montana until I finished high school and then went to Missoula, Montana. My folks had moved to Nebraska, Scott's Bluff. My Dad had worked in Fort Collins in a sugar factory as an engineer, engine operator and he decided he wanted to get back into that work so they left Montana and I decided I wished to stay and finish high school. I worked for my room and board and finished high school and graduated and then decided I was going to go on (to college). I caught a freight train with a bunch of bumms, I had saved up \$150 for my tuition and headed for the University of Montana, At Missoula, and graduated there in 1926 with a Pharmicutal/ Chemistry degree, a 4 year college course. I took the state board (exams), passed it in Montana and went to Billings where I worked for the Chapel Drug for, up to 1931 when I decided I wanted to get out of that ;cold weather and I came to California. I drove down here in an old Whippit 6 my first automobile that I had bought in 1929. I landed in San Francisco and worked for about a year for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. selling insurance. In order to become registered I had to be in California for a year when the boards were given and I passed in 1931, moved to Carmel, and worked there for the Carmel Drug Co. for one year. Then I came to Santa Maria where I worked for the Santa Maria Drug Co., Mr. L.A.

Remie was the owner and in 1934 I met my wife, Elizabeth Ritter Parsons, and was married and was keeping my eyes open for a location. The Upjohn man, Deb Young, told me of this store down here (Solvang) that had been opened by a fellow named Tapie, he was backed by his father-in-law Mr. Huston of Santa Barbara. I bought that corner down there (First and Copenhagen Streets, Solvang) from Mr. Huston because Tapie was not making a go of it. We had a soda fountain, cokes were a nickel, sodas were 15 cents, milkshakes were 15 cents, malted milks were 20 cents, and that was beside the little drug business I did. We continued there and our first son was born shortly after we came here, in this home. He was born Oct. 16, 1935 and our second son was born Nov. 14, 1938, and both went to school at Solvang School, and graduated from high school, Santa Ynez High School under the principal Mr. Carner. Mr. Visky was the math teacher. I had both children.... I kind of prompted them along (in school) because I thought they would get along better together. They both graduated and Bert, the oldest graduated in 1959, Mark graduated in 1962 and both of them worked in drug stores when they were going to school just to learn more about drug stores and they worked some in my drug store here and after they got out of school they decided they would like to go into business. Bert had been out for three years and was working for George Miller in Lompoc and he went up with Mark after Mark had been out of school for a year and had

been working in Santa Maria and they both together went in with Williams Brothers grocery, that had moved up the next block and made a drug store out of the old store. They worked in there for three years and Williams decided to sell the store so the sold to Bert and Mark and they boys are still there (on Main Street) and they do a wonderful job of prescription work, they do as high as from 300 to 400 prescriptions a day. Thats lots of prescriptions! I think it is one of the largest stores in Santa Maria and I think they have more business because they have the prescriptions area where people like to get acquainted with the pharmacist, where chain stores put it in back so you will buy something on the way to the prescription area, and thats true. Both the boys have been rather fortunate in that they have built their owu houses in Santa Maria and Bert has a family of 6 children, the oldest is 20 and graduates in nursing from St. Marys in Los Angeles, her name is Pamela. And the next one is a year younger and when in high school graduated with honors and was valedictorian at Santa Maria High. This is Chris Ann. And the next one....I'd better tell you a little more about Chris Ann. She won some kind of a national honor in that they went with other students in the United States to Salt Lake City where they met Jimmy Stewart and some other notables. The next girl is one year younger, the three girls are just a year apart, is Lisa and she is quite a writer, she won trophies at the state, up at Salinas, they

had a state writing contest and she won prizes there. She is now going to Cal. Poly, San Luis Obispo and she is aiming to take Law. The second one, Chris Ann was valedictorian at high school, got married and now has a son that is about one year old, his name is Camdon Ilif. They live in Santa Maria and now I am a great grandpa and my wife is a great grandma. My son has three other children, one boy out of five girls. He plays football and is very interested in sports. Some of them are very interested in music. Mark has three, one boy and two girls. The kids come down here and play music. the 11 year old sat down to the piano and played, "The Entertainer", by Scott Joplin, yeh! And the others have all had introductions to music and some have been very interested and some have dropped out and don't care about it. That's the way of life. Bert's son, is Wesley after his great uncle, and Mark's son is Scott, he is a good looking boy and as tall as I am and he is only 15 In 1960 I had become interested in the local drug association work and we met at Matties at Pismo Beach, Mr. George Q. Bair was secretary of the state pharmaceutical association and he got me interested in the local association and I represented our local tri-counties here for the big meeting in Los Angeles. I became president of the Southern California Pharmaceutical Assoc. in 1960 which includes all drug stores south of Bakersfield and over to Paseo Robles, down to the Mexican border. I served there

for one year, 1960, then two years later several of them wanted me to go on the state board of Pharmacy and they appointed me to the state board, there are 8 members for the state board and the work that time was under the Professional Vocational Standards for the state. It was an appointment from the governor of California. I was appointed by Gov. Brown, Sr. and served four years and I served four years under Gov. Reagan. Anyone who took the state board exams between 1962 and 1970 had my name on their pharmacy diploma. And during that time I gave the dispensing and would go to the different colleges. I knew the three deans, I became acquainted with them when they set up big rooms for dispensing and I would give the dispensing, one of the would give the math, and another, the other things that were needed. There are 8 members on the board. I tried to treat in coming pharmacists as they should be treated with only things that they are in contact with, but we had several members on that board, one who gave math and he would flunk every one in there. He would give one big strong question out of ten and it would give them pretty near all the program to answer the one, and thats true. I went over a list one year and he had flunked 28 of 33 students.

PL: You mentioned three schools that you went to, what were they?

Mr.P: The schools in the state that have Schools of Pharmacy are Univ. of Pacific, Stockton, Univ. of Cal. San Francisco,

and USC. Also when outsiders come to take the exams we would put it at a convenient place and at the time I was on the board we generally gave about 6 exams during each year.

PL: If a young person was not able to pass the exam could they take the test the following year?

Mr. P: Yes he could but he had to take the schooling before.

PL: Were you active in the drug store here in Solvang during those years?

Mr. P: Yes, the first five years I rented my drug store out in 1965, I often had Mr. Scott Sinclair from Santa Maria come down to relieve me while I was away on trips. In the mean time I had taken up flying which I will tell you about later, I woned my own ariplane, a Cessna 182 which I found very convenient to fly to these different points instead of the automobile. I took flying lessons in 1945 and there was a number of us that started a flying club, Arden Jensen, the ex-judge, Ray Passke, quite a list.

PL: Was our Santa Ynez Valley Airport operating then? Mr.

Mr. P: No, when we started flying in 1945 we landed over past the Solvang School and church (on Atterdag Dr.) down on Skytt's field and we did that for two years until Skytt decided to farm that land so we had to move and Johnny Gardner (of Buellton) give us a strip up where the Mawson place is now (north of Hwy. 246 and east of Hwy. 101). We marked out the strip and flew to there for a few years and in the

meantime we contacted the county and the county supervisors went with us and told us if we found a suitable piece of land that the county would buy the property for a landing strip. We finally found a piece and the county bought it from J.J. Mitchell and that is where our airport is located now. PL: So it was because of this group (early fliers) that we now have this ariport? Mr. P: Thats right, and I was president of the group for about ten years and during that time I was running the drug store. We had no one to occupy and work the airport, we had a pump and everything out there and we had a sign that if gas was needed to call the drug store and I would send some of my help to ge them the gasoline. In those days people were pretty honest, but we did have gas stolen a few times. PL: But you didn't have a tower? Mr. P: We didn't have a tower or hangers, everything was visual, we had an old building up there that was had our office in and we had the pump just in front of it and that is where the main office is now. The hanger there now was built by Mr. Davidge and it was built with a contract with the county that he could use that as long as he used it and then for a certaint lenght of time, 20 years, it would be turned over to the airport which it now has. The airport is now run by Mrs. Shy Smith. I still have the seal that says on it, The Santa Ynez Valley Flying Club. My first airplane was bought with Mr. George Burtness, the realitor. We bought a Stinson. He knew the airport

manager in Minneapolis who had planes for sale so we bought this Voyager which was almost new and flew it five years. Then I bought a little Aronaca and I flew that and other planes we owned at the airport. The Flying Club owned at different times, a Cessna 120, Cessna 140, Suscome, and a Stinson and several others. I had my own and flew that for several years and I taught my boys to fly. I bought a Cessna 182 and that is a grand airplane, I had oxygen in it and flew that to Montana and to Kansas.

FL: In 1945 there were not that many out learning to fly, how did this flying "bug" catch you? Mr. P: I think Passke, that was right after the war and I believe it was Ray and Youngie Passke and some of the others who got the bug and had me join with them. The Kenny Cornelius and Ray Cornelius joined later, and it became a very fine operation.

FL: Do you still fly?

Mr. P: I keep my license and then after I had gotten about 1000 hours in the air I joined the Sheriff Aero Squadron (county) The sheriffs meet once a month and I am still active in that and we had the privileges of being a sheriff and have to be active (qualify) shooting every quarter. I have dropped out but am still an associate member and I enjoy meeting with the fliers. I have always been interested in music and as I recall my Dad bought me a harmonica when I was 13 but anyway, then later I got interested in the violin, a

fellow taught me to string it and play and I played quite a lot in high school in a little orchestra, then later when I went to the university I got in a band and played trumpet and alto for three years which I got a medal for. During the time my children were in high school Mr. Hal Hamm and I put on programs. In the past two years six of us from the valley have been playing together and we call the group The Santa Ynez Valley Hill Billies, we have played at the Alisal Ranch for their Saturday night barbecues and for the families during summers and they all seem to enjoy our music, we play Turkey in the Straw, Wash, Wash Woman, Let me Call you Sweetheart, etc, and once in a while we stick in some Rock and Roll. PL: Who are the other fellows that play with you? Mr. P: Klibo plays accordion, Al Hammer plays accordion, I play violin and harmonica, Mr. Pellerine plays the gut bucket, John Ivers plays guitar and sings, Fred Brown plays banjo. We have been really awfully busy. We play for Senior Citizens often.

End of Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

PL: Do you remember those early days with your Father and Mother?

Mr. P: I remember my father being quite a strict man and saying

that we children had to get out and work. We would get up early and harness the horses, milk a bunch of cows, run an old ice cream milk separator, and do all those chores and then we would have breakfast and go out to the fields and work. It was hard work. In the winter we also had to get to school.

In school I liked math and during high school I took business arithmetic, algebra, geometry, solid geometry, trigonometry. My principal was a lady, her name was Gladys Lewis and I have kept in contact with her all my life, I would go back and see her. Her family were very good to me when my family moved to Nebraska. They had to do with my going to college, they encouraged me saying, You can do it Lenny! I think I got so tired of looking at a cow that I wanted to look the other way so I went to college. PL:

PL: How did you get interested in pharmacy?

Mr. P: At first when I went to the university I entered in Business Administration and they had quarters there, three quarters a year, I did one quarter of that and I could see that some of the friends of mine would get out of school and take a short course in Business Administration and they seemed to know more than I did so I switched to Pharmacy. Then I went ahead and got a graduate degree but that degree did not amount to as much as Pharmacy Chemist, so I later when I got my PhD in Pharmaceutical Chemistry. Math was very easy for me. Both my children when they were in school took math with Mr. Vinsky. I always saw

that my boys got their math in the evenings with their homework.

PL: Were your two brothers good students too?

Mr. P: Both of my brothers quit after high school. They were not interested in going on. One became a crane operator and the other a butcher.

PL: What are your memories of your Mother?

Mr. P: My mother was very good to us and she used to work at threshing time feeding all those men from the crews. There was a large crew of 15 to 20 men. Some of the neighbors would come and help each other during threshing season. There were bread and pies to make.

PL: Later your father decided not to farm anymore?

Mr. P: Yeh, he decided to go back to the sugar factory work. And

PL: Did you live in Nebraska?

Mr. P: No, but I went down and worked in the sugarfactory one fall after I got out of high school. I was an oiler.

PL: When you came to Calif. did your folks stay in Nebraska?

Mr. P: Yes, they lived there the rest of their lives. They came out to visit once, my mother died rather early but Dad out when my children were little guys, he died in 1950. He loved Solvang.

PL: Were you ever homesick during college?

Mr. P: Never a bit. Seems like a lot of my friends that had gone through school with me were there and I still enjoy going back and visiting them. The Millers, Harold, Clyde. I lived in a log house during my college years that was

adjoining the Howard High school, there was just a fence between us and the old old house. I had a stove in there that I put wood into and it would get red hot. I cooked

myself. I think part of the time I worked for my meals up at the Lewis Ranch. I just can't remember how I did it but I did. I mentioned Pamela, my grand daughter. She has a birthday on Aug 24, so I wrote a poem when she was three months, as it was Thanksgiving and I'd like to read it. (He read the poem).

PL: I'd like to talk with your wife for a little. What brought you to California?

Mrs. P: I had an aunt who lived in Santa Maria and she wanted my sister and me to come out. I worked for Robert E. Histon and my sister worked for Mr. McCoy of the Santa Maria Inn. I just had high school training.

Mrs.P: How did you meet your husband?

It was so long ago! (Mr. Parsons says," In the Ramie Drug Store")

PL: You came to Solvang in the 1930's, did you like it?

Mrs. P: Yes, I like it still. I was never much of a cook, I could do book keeping better and I helped in the drug store and the boys helped, it was a family affair.

Mr. P: When they had their first Danish Days we did not call it that in 1936, that was the 26th anniversary of the founding of Solvang.

PL: In those days did you close the store to go home for

lunch?

Mr. P: No, not the drug store, we stayed open. The first day we made nine dollars I think, July 9, 1935. Frankly it was mostly ? , it had been a drug store before. Vic Brun used to work for me and then Charlie Christensen. He is now a contractor, alot of the kids worked for me.

PL: How do you like the way Solvang is going now?

Mr. P: I think we would be much better off incorporation. I'll tell you why. Now you take this street, First, I feel that Copenhagen should come on down here. The county requires you have have so many parking spaces on a fifty foot wide by 130 deep lot but with a 50 ft lot, 25 feet has to be used for parking and entering. The county just does not car. It used to be one parking space for every 650 st and now it is 250 ft.

PL: How did you get interested in the Theaterfest?

I owned the land from the alley down to the corner on 2nd St. except Bob Knobles place, it was two and a half lots. I was offered \$150,000 for it. At that time in 1974 the Theaterfest people were dickering with Bob Stevens for the Old Roeser Mill property on First St. He was giving them rather a hard time so I wrote Mr. (Donovan) Marley and told him that if they were looking for property I would offer him the two and a half lots for the theater, as Solvang needed a theater. I said I would give him a good deal and would sell the lots for \$75,000. We are not rich but I wanted to help so I sold it for the \$75,000 price,

and he wrote back a nice letter. Roger Neilsen was on that committee. I gave them four years before they had to start paying on it, except for taxes. And 8% interest. So I would figure out the taxes at the end of the year and they paid and that went on for four years until they started paying me back. 1978. They did a good job of building the place and believe me people come from all over the place to see the plays. It worked out well. I don't know if people give me much credit but I still have that letter (from Donovan Marley). You know what they did....? I sold Hanna McNamara that lot for \$35,000 and she had her little business (hot dog stand) here and she did not want to sell her lot but she said she wanted \$300,000 for it a 50 ft. lot. Mr. John Seversen bought the lot between her and the alley from Bill Luton, Jr. Bill Luton had bought that lot to build a movie theater, he bought from Mrs. Phyllis Brown, who had bought it from me at \$42,000. When Seversen bought from Luton he paid \$84,000. Then Seversen bought out Hanna for \$250,000 when years before I had sold it to her for \$35,000. that property is now the lobby of the theater with grass and trees that you see today.

PL: Thank you both, Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, for this interview.